



News Release

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Back to school season is vaccine check up time

OLYMPIA — “What did you do on summer vacation?” That’s a common question when kids head back to school. Whether you went to Illinois to visit grandma, saw a Mariners game at Safeco Field, or took the trip of a lifetime to China, you may have come back carrying more than just the memories and souvenirs.

As international travel becomes more common, so has the number of vaccine preventable diseases that are being imported. Many diseases that are rare in the U.S. still cause devastating illness in other parts of the world. You don’t even have to go to these places to be exposed. Some viruses stay in the air for quite awhile and all it takes to be exposed is to breathe the same air as someone who carried the disease back with them from a trip overseas. So, before those summer memories fade away, start the school year off with the comfort of knowing your children are fully immunized.

“Kids deserve a healthy start when school opens,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky, “that’s why it’s so important to make sure your children are up to date with required immunizations before school starts.”

Immunization rates are relatively high in Washington, yet about one quarter of all two-year olds are not fully immunized. The percentage of teens and adults who are not fully protected is even higher. As parents take their children shopping for school clothes and “back to school” classroom supplies, they should make it part of the routine to see their health care provider to check on what vaccinations the children need to return to school.

Several immunizations are required before children are allowed to attend school. All children in kindergarten and first grade must receive a second dose of the measles-containing vaccine, usually given as the “MMR.” Most kids get the first dose between 12 and 15 months. The Centers for Disease

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Control and Prevention recommends the second dose be administered to children between ages four and six, rather than waiting until they reach the sixth grade. Students in sixth through twelfth grade still need the second dose of MMR if they haven't received it. The required hepatitis B vaccine has been extended to include kindergarten through fourth grade students. Immunization exemptions are allowed for medical, personal, or religious reasons.

Vaccinations against such childhood diseases as measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis B, whooping cough and polio are a safe and effective way to prevent serious complications associated with these illnesses. Parents, health care providers, day care centers and schools can play an active role to ensure that children in Washington are protected against possible complications from vaccine preventable diseases. The department encourages parents and providers to include immunization checks at every office visit.

For information on immunizations, check our Web site <http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize>.

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